

Apartadó, Colombia  
WOMEN'S RIGHTS  
Interview with Adela Torres



**What are your thoughts on this first meeting on women agro-industrial workers' rights?**

There was a huge turnout of women who work both in the agro-industrial sector as well as and the agri-food sector. They got involved in the different activities and felt part of this project to protect their rights, which was kick-started by SINTRAINAGRO.

Those from other departments and regions in Colombia asked us to visit them and to keep them involved in our activities. All in all, it was a wonderful and very rewarding experience.

**What were the biggest problems which came to light during those two days?**

Amongst the biggest problem areas highlighted by the workers were harassment in the workplace, often involving sexual harassment, persecution for belonging to a trade union, and work-related illnesses. Also, almost all of the women complained about the lack of support from their union representatives on our organisation's board.

**In the case of Urabá, we have increasingly seen a demand for hiring a greater number of women on banana plantations.**

It is something we really care about and we have been setting up Collective Bargaining Agreements for businesses to sign, stating that they must employ at least one woman per plantation.

**Unfortunately, not all of them have signed this and we are still being faced with clear discrimination against women workers.**

Alongside the National Apprenticeship Service (SENA), we have been working on a state training programme for women who want training in specific areas. Unfortunately, even if they are qualified, if women do not have anywhere to practice those skills, it becomes very difficult for them to find work.

**This very earnest demand which women workers have put forward will have to be discussed with the Colombian Banana Association (Augura).**

That's right. We invited Augura's president to the event, so that he could listen to the women's testimonies. Unfortunately, he couldn't make it. However, in the next few days we are going to meet to discuss this very issue and to see how we can work together on it.

**It should also be acknowledged that during the period of terrible violence which shook Urabá, it was the women who went to work in the plantations. In this circumstance, there was no discrimination and it was the women who kept the production going.**

The violence kept thousands of men away. The owners even created TV adverts because there weren't enough workers. Those who dared to come to work were women.

**Unfortunately, Patricia Alonso, president of the Latin American Committee for Women of the IUF (CLAMU) couldn't take part in the event.**

These things happen but, despite the fact she couldn't come, it felt like she was there with us in spirit, spurring us on. I am sure there will be another occasion for us to work together.